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**U.S.A.** (in U.S. funds): Individual:  
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ISSN 1192-5507



# from the editor

It's either feast or famine for the fragile Canadian feature-film industry. In an extraordinary 10-month period, from the Cannes Film Festival in France (May 2003) through to the Oscars® in Hollywood (February 2004), our national cinema was on a role unlike it's ever seen in its short history. With the release David Cronenberg's *Spider* and Denys Arcand's *Les Invasions barbares*, two outstanding films by our best directors (both of which appeared on the recent TIFF list of the top Canadian films of all

time), a record four films that broke the \$5-million bar at the domestic box office (*Séraphin*, *Seducing Doctor Lewis*, *Les Invasions barbares* and *Mambo Italiano*), significant wins at Cannes (Best Screenplay and Best Actress for *Les Invasions barbares*) and Canada's second Oscar® for a fictional feature (Best Foreign-Language Film for the aforementioned *Les Invasions*), 2003 will go down as a high-water mark for future generations to match.

Yet, sadly, it seems the tide has run out, and we now turn to the old familiar, dreary phrase: What is the future for Canadian film? Apart from one or two made-in-Quebec hits such as *Monica la mitraille* and *Camping Sauvage*, which will not see the light of day in the rest of Canada, 2004 has been a bleak year for Canadian features. Critically praised English-Canadian films such as *Sex, Love and Eating the Bones*, *Touch of Pink* and *The Snow Walker* came and went without causing a box-office ripple, and even the highly rated *The Saddest Music in the World*, directed by Guy Maddin, one of English Canada's true auteurs, failed to impress the filmgoing public.

To add insult to injury, offshore productions (the infamous "runaway" films that California's Governor Schwarzenegger is so fond of dissing) were down a drastic 30 per cent in 2004, from a high in 2001. This phenomenon was accelerated by the great SARS scare of 2003; however, the real reason for this downturn is not the bombast of the "Governator" or the unpredictable forces of nature but the fact that the American economy has been thrown into the dumpster by the Bush administration. Consequently, the American dollar has lost its value against all major world currencies, including Canada's. Once trading close to 1.5, the Canadian dollar is now at 1.15 in relation to the American greenback. Understandably, Hollywood producers, who have no loyalty except to the bottom line, have decamped and gone elsewhere, leaving the Canadian industry in a severe slump.

Will it recover? From my point of view, the best hope for Canadian cinema is the recent appointment of S. Wayne Clarkson to replace the outgoing Richard Stursberg as executive director of Telefilm Canada. A true believer with a impressive track record as the head of the Toronto film festival (where he launched Perspective Canada), first CEO of the Ontario Film Development Corporation (where he launched the Toronto new wave) and more recently the head of the Canadian Film Centre (which he turned into a hothouse for low-budget filmmaking), Clarkson is on the record as saying that the way to develop a viable industry is not by luring Hollywood producers to turn Canada in their backlot. Instead, he believes that by encouraging our most talented and creative people to create a distinctive, homegrown cinema, Canadian filmmakers can take on the world. But will he be able to encourage Canadians to watch their own films? That's his difficult task ahead, and he's the best person to take up the challenge.

Wyndham Wise, *Editor-in-Chief*